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ABSTRACT

This document reports on a pilot study of public attitudes toward professional development for teachers. The study was based on four focus groups conducted by Public Agenda in Fort Lee (New Jersey), Birmingham (Alabama), Denver (Colorado), and Albuquerque (New Mexico). Each group was comprised of approximately 10 participants recruited by local market research firms to conform to national census data on such demographic variables as race, income, sex, and education, as well as the demographic characteristics of the local population; teachers and school administrators were excluded from the discussions. Key public perceptions of professional development and teachers are summarized as well as the public's caveats on professional education. Among the results are: (1) the public's foremost educational concerns are safety, discipline, social problems, and children not learning the basics; (2) teachers are still held in high regard; and (3) professional development enables teachers to keep up with changes and challenges. While professional development is seen as positive and improvement of teachers as an asset to schools, people also expect professional development to bring quick and tangible payoffs in student achievement. They do not support it if it is connected with "controversial" teaching methods, takes teachers out of the classroom during school time, and costs too much taxpayer money. The most striking implication from the focus group discussions is a strong potential for both support of and disappointment with professional development. (ND)

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